



Student evaluation of teachers: An indicator of teacher effectiveness

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Abstract

Since last three decades, every commission for the improvement of education has amply suggested that teachers should be evaluated. However, the discourse is: evaluation of what? It is evident that teaching is first and foremost responsibility of a teacher. Hence, assessment of classroom teaching is the indicator of teacher effectiveness. This generates the quest: who should be assessors? If students are the beneficiaries of the teaching-learning transactions, the education reform committees and policy makes recommends that students should take the berth to give feedback: what is going in the classroom? The present article reviews the process of student evaluation of teachers, its uses and abuses. A well thought process is needed to implement Student Evaluation of Teacher (SET) in Indian academia. Most importantly, SET should be developed on based over grounded research and scientific enquiry.

Keywords: evaluation, teacher, effectiveness.

Introduction

With the emergence of globalization, dilution of boundaries is taking place, creating both interdependence and coexistence on the basis of shared values. For peaceful coexistence and interdependence, the challenge is to strengthen, preserve and reconcile our human resource. However, it is observed that there is a 'positive surge' in the quantity of higher education with a noticeable 'negative surge' in the quality. The march towards quality education then realizes the importance of the purpose that an institution has to endeavor to churn out quality output. Every successful educational enterprise require optimum utilization of human capabilities available to the system. This especially then draws one's attention to the moulder of today's generation, who should deliver with efficiency and accountability. A teacher has to sensitize to understand the changing role of education, identification and characteristics of values, their relevance and suitability in the context Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG). To create a better 'knowledge society', it is required that a teacher should act as a leader making education a meaningful activity rather than acting as a shepherd leading a herd of pupils towards nowhere. Hence, ensuring quality in education demands preserving quality in teachers. In this regard, almost all the national consultation and committee in India constituted to focus on promotion of quality in education has suggested an introduction of student evaluation of teachers which is still continue to be a bone of contention in many countries. Policy makers, very aptly, suggest that students are the best judges because they are the direct beneficiaries of what has been delivered in the classroom. Moreover, to be a successful enterprise, it is required that every person should be accountable to the members of the group and every group to the other group. Supporting the importance of student evaluation of teachers, Harrison,

Ryan and Moore (1996) affirm that students seem to possess implicit theories associated with the occurrence and non-occurrence of specific behaviors of teachers, therefore, student also possess self-insight into how they make overall evaluations when incorporating those theories. However, it is necessary to search a better understanding, implementation strategies and practices for the process, i.e., student evaluation teachers (SET), in our country before making it an essential criterion for 'Teacher Appraisal'. The present research paper attempts to provide an overview of findings and researches to— indicate implication for the use and application for the ratings; explore directions for developing a student rating instrument; and examine abuses in the process. With this better conceptualization, the process (SET) will help to develop a better leadership quality among teachers to run teaching-learning process democratically.

Background of Set

While SET has been apparently first used in the early 1920's in University of Washington, it has been increasingly used in US universities since early 1960's for decision on tenure and promotion. The SET is used not only in the US campuses but also in Australia, Canada, Europe and Great Britain. Tracing the history of SET by Bradbeer and Lo (2004), the modern era of student evaluation of teachers (SET) has been roughly broken into four periods: the thirty year period up to 1960, the 1960s, the 1970s and the period from the 1980s to the present. Before 1960, most of the research on student evaluations was conducted at Purdue University. It was the students' protests of the 1960s for that evaluating their teachers was one way of making their voices heard. In the beginning, students administered this evaluation in haphazard way. This resulted in Michigan State University in 1960s, developing one first commonly used and accepted evaluation forms, the Student

Instructional Rating Report. During 1970s, most universities in N. America adopted some form of student evaluation of teachers for formative evaluation which further metamorphosed mainly for summative purposes that heads and deans could use for. A recommendation for SET tops the list among the six suggestions for improvement of teaching made by Carnegie commission (1972). It was found that use of student ratings as evaluation tools had increased by 57% between 1973 and 1993. The fourth period, from the 1980 until today, is characterized by more detailed use of newer and refined statistical techniques such as meta-analysis of the SET data.

First ever constituted University Education Commission (1948-49), soon after the independence in India, realised that the success of the educational process depends so much on the character and ability of the teacher that in any plan of university reform the main concern must be for securing an adequate staff with qualifications necessary for the discharge of its many-sided duties (Government of India, 1950) ^[7]. Similarly, Report of the Education Commission (1964-66) felt that of all the different factors which influence the quality of education and its contribution to national development, the quality, competence and character of teachers are undoubtedly the most significant (NCERT, 1966) ^[15]. Every important Commission on Education since Independence has emphasized their vital role in national development and the urgent need for according them proper status and improved working conditions in order to enable them to reach higher levels of performance and effectiveness (National Commission on Teachers 1983) ^[16]. Emphasizing the need for teacher accountability in India, the Rastogi Pay committee instituted by the University Grant Commission (UGC) has stressed that student appraisal of teachers should be an integral part of package recommendation on pay scale and service conditions. The National Policy of Education, NPE (1986) observed a comprehensive open participatory database system of teacher evaluation. It includes self, peers, heads of institutions/departments, *students* and others. Mehrotra committee (1987) too realizes the need for compulsory annual submission of 'Performance Appraisal' and students should evaluate their performance. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) of India, established by University Grants Commission in 1994 to initiate quality management procedure, has made the institution of higher education to introduce student evaluation of teachers as one of the criteria for assessing teaching quality. The guidelines given by NAAC for Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) consist of various questionnaires for collecting feedback from students in structured way. Similarly, Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme (TEQIP) of Government of India consequent to implementation of reforms derived from (National Policy of Education (NPE-1986 as revised in 1992) by institutions. The reforms to be carried out may, among others, include establishing the practices of student evaluation of teachers' performance and teaching counseling. The committees which also recommend student evaluation of teachers (SET) as an integral part of

appraisal system are Prof. Amrik Singh Committee, Ashok Mitra Education commission during early 1990s and recent 'Perspective Plan' by Higher Education Commission of West Bengal. In recent decision, the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan has decided to adopt a system of evaluation of teachers by the students. According to the new rule (i.e., 81-E), children from class V to XII would be given printed assessment forms in the month of October and they would have to tick mark against the appropriate grading. In particular, this shows the attitude of the institutions towards the reliability on student feedback and competence of students to provide meaningful feedback. The sixth pay commission (2006) has also mentioned that student evaluation should be taken into consideration for assessment of classroom teaching.

Administration Process

For student ratings results to be valid, they must be obtained from properly administered tests, stringently controlled data collection, and thoroughly analysis of test results. The conventional process by which the SET data (on a particular instructor of a particular class) are collected, analyzed and may be characterized, as follows-

1. The SET survey instrument is comprised of a series of close-ended and open-ended items about 'teacher effectiveness'.
2. Closed-ended items are responded over a scale with range of possible values.
3. In the closed-ended section of the SET survey instrument, the question of central impact with "summative" function is "single-most-important-question", i.e., SMIQ. It asks to students, "overall, how would you rate this teacher".
4. In the open-ended section of the SET survey, instrument invites student to offer short critiques of effectiveness of the teacher.
5. The SET survey instrument ensures the anonymity of individual respondents.
6. The SET survey instrument is administered (i) by a representative of the administration to the students of a given; (ii) in the latter part of the semester /academic session; and (iii) in the absence of the teacher.
7. Upon completion of the survey, the response to each question on each questionnaire then analyzed, and then constructs question specific and class-specific measures of central tendency, and dispersion to determine measured level of "teacher effectiveness" for particular teacher.
8. Raw SET data used may not provide for background data of the student (e.g., subject taken, grade, session, age, gender.....).

After recognizing the uses of SET, it is required to develop sensitive instrument, which could evaluate teachers on the basis of empirical evidence. Information from student evaluation of teachers necessarily depends on the content of the evaluation items. Because the process has a diagnostic value, poorly worded or ill-defined items will not able to measure strengths and weaknesses of a teacher. Most importantly, a sensitive instrument gives a platform to raise students' unheard

voices. The selection/development of instrument depends most prominently upon various considerations such as (a) the objective of the study, (b) the amount of time at the disposal of researcher, (c) availability of suitable tests, (d) personal competence of the investigator to administer, score and analyze the test results and the like. Moreover, for data to have any interpretability, the instrument thus selected should possess up to a satisfying mark the characteristics of (a) reliability, (b) validity, (c) sensitivity, (d) appropriateness, (e) objectivity (f) feasibility, and (g) ethical standards (Fox, 1969) ^[6].

Instrument for Set

Before developing/selecting the appropriate instrument, a review of teacher evaluation instrument should be made. Although, many institutes collect formally and informally students' feedback about teachers, there is a scarcity of scientifically developed instrument in India. Evaluation done by students for Lecturers in Shanmugha Arts, Science, Technology & Research Academy, Tamilnadu, is used for administrative decision and feedback to teacher. Evaluation Form contains 20 items. Among these items, 15 items were dispersed over sections: Subject Matter, Teaching–Learning Process, Use of Learning Resources, Evaluation Process and General Points. These 15 items are responded over 5-point scale ranging from *mostly* (A) to *Rarely* (B). The rest of the 5 items are responded over YES or NO. Comments about the teacher are also sought. 'Evaluation Performa' for Guest Lecturer in Xavier Institute of Social Service, Ranchi, includes three items, i.e., course coverage; practical usefulness of the matter explained in class and manner of presentation by the teacher; and ability to communicate in a Likert 5-point scale including *inadequate* (1) to *excellent* (5). Similarly, Evaluation of guest Faculty in Govind Ballab Pant social science Institute, Allahabad, includes items related to course coverage, weakness and strengths of the Faculty. Evaluation form of the teachers from SIES college of Management Studies, Maharashtra, has been reviewed. The Form contains 14 questions, responded on 3-point scale ranging from: *Good* (1) to *bad* (3). Annual Confidential Report for Teaching Staff (up to Vice-Principal) of Kendriya Vidyalaya consists of four parts. It includes: Part 1: Personal; Part 2: Self-appraisal; Part 3: assessment of the Teacher; and Part 4: Remarks of Reviewing Officer. Balachandran constructed an instrument, Rating Scale for Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (RASSETE), in Indian setup at 1981 for her doctoral thesis. The RASSETE contains 35 items. After reviewing the literature the related instrument, it is necessary to conduct a content analysis of the instruments in order to identify the factors. The developmental problems of teacher evaluation programs begin with the fundamental consideration: evaluation of what?. Criteria used to determine teacher quality would seem to center on the teaching/ learning/assessment cycle. If student evaluations of faculty are a questionable measure of teacher effectiveness, then what do they measure? If a survey contains a heterogeneous mixture of different items and student rating is summarized by an average of these items, then there is no basis for knowing what is being measured. Researchers suggests that if a

survey contains separate groups of related items, and empirical procedures demonstrate that these items do measure the same underlying trait, then it is easier to interpret what is being measured. The student-rating literature does contain several examples of instrument that have a well-defined factor structure and provide measures of distinct areas of teacher effectiveness (e.g., Frey *et al.*, 1975; Marsh, 1982a, 1982b; Hildebrand *et al.*, 1971). According to Marsh (1984, 1993), there are several reasons why evaluation of teaching should be considered as multifaceted (e.g. Crunkshank, 1985; Gage & Becliner, 1992; Huilt, 1995), then instruments for student evaluations should reflect this multidimensionality. Secondly, there is no single criterion of effective teacher (e.g., Mckeachie, 1990). Different factors of student evaluations will correlate more highly with different indicators of effective teacher (e.g., Mckeachie, 1973). So, student ratings should not be summarized by one response to a single item or an unweighted average response to a single item or an unweighted average response to many items. Multidimensionality is important not only because of its obvious diagnostic utility as instructor feedback but also because it provides a more sophisticated and realistic assessment of the various aspects of teaching. For the development of instrument, Cashin (1990) makes suggestion for short and long (diagnostic) rating forms that include open-ended comments. Cashin & Downey (1992) suggests that, because, global items accounted for a substantial amount of the variance, a short and economical form could capture much of information needed for summative evaluation and longer diagnostic forms could be reserved for teaching improvement. Marsh & Roche (1997) ^[10] concluded that the validity and usefulness of student evaluations of teaching information depends on the content and the coverage of the items. Poorly worded or inappropriate items will not provide useful information, whereas, scores averaged across an ill-defined assortment of items after no basis for knowing what is being measured. In practice, most instruments are based on a mixture of logical and pragmatic considerations occasionally included some psychometric evidence such as reliability or factors analysis. Eley & Stecher (1997) ^[4] compare the common Likert agree/disagree question form to behavioral observation form for faculty evaluation. The Likert- type format prompted more objective responses. Results suggest use of behavioral observation rather than agree/disagree questions can yield measurably greater inter rater reliability and capability to distinguish among levels of teaching quality. Thus, developing the tool for student evaluation of teachers include pool/select items on the basis of set objectives where items should be clear, unambiguous and representative of construct "teacher effectiveness". For the multi-dimensionality of the tool, factors should be identified with respect to existing socio-cultural context. Moreover, factors should be culturally *free* and *fair* for diversified culture in India.

Uses of Set

The traditional view is that a teacher in his classroom must be left alone with his or her devices. A major flaw

in the system is that the Principal is so engaged in administration that he or she cannot devote time in monitoring, assessing and taking remedial measures of improving the quality of education being imparted. Moreover, the permanent staff in the school finds it offensive that the all-powerful Principal would intrude into their classroom without invitation. Many teachers find visits by inspector threatening and visits by colleagues intrusive. Yet, without direct appraisal of teaching, any hope of improving what goes on in classroom is futile. If someone is teaching badly, no amount of in-service training or attending course will cure it and final outcome will be rotten results. In this regard, evaluation of teachers by taught, and not just by their "line managers" or their peers, would help to produce better teaching. Argument is students have front row seat to observe teacher's behaviors and classroom processes, and are the best judge of what they have learnt (Scriven, 1995) ^[20].

On the basis of previous researches and available literature, the use of student evaluation of teachers is variously to:

1. Improve the quality of teaching and services to the students (Kremer, 1988).
2. Enable the teacher to recognize his/her role in the total school program (Rebore, 1991).
3. Assist the teacher in achieving the established goals of curriculum.
4. Help the teacher identify his/her strengths and weaknesses as a personal guide for his/her improvement (Harrison & Ryan, 1995) ^[19].
5. Provide assistance to the teacher to help correct weaknesses (Marsh & Roche, 1997) ^[10].
6. Recognize the teacher's special talents and to encourage and facilitate their utilization (Rossi & Tepper, 1998).
7. Serve as a guide for renewed employment, termination of employment, promotion, assignment and unrequested leave for tenured teachers (Harrison & Ryan, 1995) ^[19].
8. Protect the teacher from dismissal without just cause.
9. Protect the teaching profession from unethical and incompetent personals (Erwin, 1994).

There is a dearth of research conducted on 'Student Evaluation of Teachers' in India. The noted research on this issue has been conducted by Balachandran (2000) suggests that evaluation of teachers may be carried out for more of the uses is to: (1) reward good teaching; (2) find the quality of teaching for tenure; (3) give feedback to teachers for improving teaching; and (4) undertake researches.

On the basis of above mentioned purposes, student evaluation of teachers can be broadly categorized in two groups of evaluation: Formative Evaluation and Summative Evaluation.

Summative Evaluation

It is a tool used to make personal decisions. In this evaluation, raw data is to provide student input to the management charged with the responsibility deciding on the reappointment, pay, merit pay, tenure and promotion

of an individual teacher. It is viewed as controversial by attitude among teachers for the student evaluation.

Formative Evaluation

It is aimed at personal teaching improvement. It is designed to provide information to the teacher which he/she can use in current and future classes. It initiates the improvement in weak areas. It is the tool to provide student's feedback to teacher on its effectiveness in class. It is viewed as non-controversial as it gives the scope for self-improvement.

Advocating the evaluation by students, Evans (2004) ^[5] asserts the stands to reason that seeking students' opinions in beneficial not only in so far as they can indicate to a teacher if they understand what is going in a class, but also as it gives the students a voice in their own education. The concern with student ratings then, is more with how they are used (in terms of promotion and administration). Whether student evaluations should be used for such matters as promotion is a vexing issue, but as a diagnostic for enabling a teacher to improve their own teaching, student feedback would seem to be an invaluable recourse. One of the outcomes of evaluation could be possibility of extending vertical mobility, rewards or incentives to the teacher. Apart professional upgradation, certain amount of motivation could also be achieved. In view of large scale expansion, the unstated objective of teacher evaluation often becomes ensuring the 'maintenance' of standards and norms. Thus, SET is necessary and supplemented through two-way exchange of views in the sense of helping teachers to solve their problem.

Abuses in Set

Reviewing the uses of the SET process reveal that the primary purpose of the teacher evaluation is to help teacher improve their performance. However, the close examination of the system (SET) which has been practiced indicates that the primary purpose is almost always to make personal decisions, i.e., to make decisions for retention, promotion, tenure, and salary increases. Herein lays the problem. The teachers are threatened by its deceptive use. The proposed purpose of the SET in educational system is fulfilled only when questionnaire is properly administered and by controlled data analyses. However, abuses of the process lies in frequent and common errors occurred during implementation of the process. A report by Scriven (1995) ^[20] enlisted these errors categorically.

Frequent errors include

1. Making instructors to collect forms rating their own instructional merit.
2. Lack of control over pleas for unspoken sympathy by the teacher before forms are distributed.
3. Failing to ensure an acceptable return rate.
4. To ensure the validity of results; and errors in data processing, report design, and interpretation.

Common errors include

1. The use of average alone, without regard to the distribution.

2. Failure to set up appropriate comparison groups so that the usual tendency for rating to be can be taken into account.
3. Treating small differences as significant, just because they are statistically significant.
4. Using student ratings as an important source of data for the evaluation of teaching merit.

Adding to these limitations, Aleamoni (1987) reports that most research and use of the student rating forms occurred at the college and university level, and it is possible therefore, that the needs of students at high school level are different, as the needs and expectations of students will change as they mature. Summing up the statements given by faculty in educational research, Haskell (1997)^[9] points out the abuses of the process that SET (1) is prima facie evidence of administrative intrusion into the classroom; (2) are often used as an instrument of intimidation forcing conformity to politically correct standards (Young, 1993)^[23]; (3) create pressure for a self-policed lowered teaching standards (Bonnetti, 1994); (4) are responsible for a considerable amount of grade inflation (Greenwald, 1996; Greenwald & Gillmore, 1966), (5) function as prescriptions used for classroom demeanor (Damron, 1996); (6) when used for promotion, salary raises or continued employment, SET becomes potent means of manipulating the behavior of faculty (Stone, 1995); (7) when salary and promotions are consequences of SET, there is presence for faculty to teach in manner that results in higher student evaluation (Damron, 1996); (8) contrary to their original intent of improving instruction, do not eliminate poor or below-average teachers but increases poor teaching practices (Carry, 1993), (9) illustrate a mercantile philosophy of “Consumerism” (Bensen & Lewis, 1994), which erodes academic (Goldman, 1993, Renner, 1981); (10) have their lowered quality of US education (Carey, 1993, Crumbly & Fliender, 1995, Young, 1993)^[23], (11) lead to the inappropriate dismissal of faculty (Parini, 1995), and (12) constitute a threat to academic freedom (Dershowitz, 1994, Stone, 1995). Similarly, argument initiates often that whether data received from SET gives valid and sole basis for judging a teacher’s worth. Haskell (1997)^[9] asserts that unlike the body of research on the methodology of SET construction and validity of the ratings, there is a paucity of data on the issue of its impact on the academic freedom. The likely reasons for this paucity of data are that (1) there has been little professional mention of SET as an infringement on academic freedom; (2) some faculty are embarrassed to admit that student evaluations may influence their professional behavior in the classroom; (3) to question the right of students to evaluate faculty may be considered unprofessional if not democratic; (4) to question the right of students to evaluate faculty may be self-serving; and (5) SET tends to not to be high status research. Finally when SET is recognized to have an impact, unlike traditional threats to tenure and academic freedom, the deceptive appearance of SET does not seem to warrant serious concern.

There are few arguments which discourage advocates of SET for debating that students provide the only source of

reliable information on teacher effectiveness. The reasons are:

1. The advocates of SET process would argue that student is a customer and education is a “Public Good”, therefore business plan should be driven by customer opinion. However, education is a “Private Good”, where students are solely qualified to evaluate the pedagogical style by faculty member.
2. The student-instructor relationship is not one of the Customer-Purveyor, and hence not between equals, the SET process itself offers the illusion that it is. By allowing the process, the teacher loses half or more of the authority to teach. Thus, it inclines the student, when he learns little, to blame the teacher rather than himself.
3. Because of the age and therefore relative ignorance, students are not sufficiently well-informed about the societal needs for educated persons. Therefore, students are not in the position of taking such responsibility.
4. The SET process assures that the identity of the students would not be revealed. This contains a latent message that there is no “student responsibility” resulting personal consequences to students for a negligent, false, or even malicious representation.

Discussion

Performance evaluation of teachers is an extremely delicate and solemn task, which requires a high degree of uprightness and integrity on the part of the assessor. There has been an informal assessment of teachers by students in our academe from time immemorial— the learners have a habit of giving a wide berth to mentors who do not come well prepared for the class and who do not teach well. Introducing student evaluation of their teachers systematically will not only ensure truant teachers don’t bunk the classes but also contribute towards the long cherished dream of improving teaching standard. It has been observed that tenure, promotion and retention of teachers in Private institutions (managed in lieu of Government) often based on feedback obtained from students which has been informally taken. This informal evaluation of teachers sometimes causes honest teachers to be terminated because of false allegation from their superiors. A systematically carried out student evaluation of teachers can protect the dismissal of a teacher for just cause. It is not only used as a guide for renewed employment, but it also highlights the strength and weak areas of a teacher. Researchers have proposed better paradigm for the evaluation of teacher effectiveness to reduce an evaluator’s biases. Adaptation from Arnoult and Anderson (1988) suggests (a) gather as much evidence as possible; (b) employ multiple evaluators who have different viewpoints and interests ; (c) vary the observational circumstances to provide for different emphasis in the environment ; (d) review video tapes for greater accuracy ; (e) compare the criteria on balance sheets to establish evidence for and against an evaluation; (f) solicit an explanation of the results and subsequent conclusions made by evaluators to reveal gaps in reasoning. Cashin (1990) present’s recommendations for teacher evaluation include: (1) using multiple sources

of data about faculty members; (2) using student ratings as one aspect; and (3) determining the purpose of the ratings before they are collected. Recommendations made for the administration of the student rating system include anonymity of the student raters. Similarly, Narang (1992) presents an approach to the evaluation of college faculty teaching which stresses input from students, colleagues, the department head, and the faculty member under review. Mentioned evaluation guidelines further suggests that evaluation criteria and measurement process, as well as the instrument used for measuring performance, be jointly approved and accepted. Data should be interpreted in relation to valid norms or standards. Recognizing shortcomings of the process, Davis (1995) directed faculty members to explain the importance of the evaluation process to students, in an effort to elicit a fair and thoughtful response by students. Cook (1989) advocated that training student raters is an effort to reduce the halo effect on Likert scale evaluation instrument. According to Cook, students trained on the importance of ratings and given information and opportunity to provide quality ratings, do so with regularity. These proposed designs of SET are the examples of structured attempt to imbibe a philosophy to encourage improvement rather than to punish. It should not reflect the traditional view of merit or performance evaluation of the individual, but it should increase the likelihood that quality teaching will be recognized and rewarded.

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